

GUIDEBOOK

Good Practice for the Integration of Asylum Seekers into the Local Community

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Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants



Table of contents

Who is this guide for?	3
About the Project	3
The integration policy in Latvia	4
Get to know!	4
Statistics for 2023	6
More information on integration and asylum in Latvia	6
Cultural activities.	7
Health promotion activities.	10
Sport activities	11
Sport events	14
Sports stadium renovated	16
Adoption of good practices.	17
Photo captions	19



Who is this guide for?

The guide “Good Practices for the Integration of Asylum Seekers into the Local Community” provides a collection of activities with visualisations, photos and descriptions that can serve as an initial reference source and an example for the organisation of integration-related measures for municipalities, public institutions, non-governmental organisations and all citizens interested in the integration of asylum seekers and any immigrants and refugees in the local community and in European society as a whole.

An asylum seeker making the long and often very dangerous journey to Europe is likely to have left home in search of safety, a new home, economic stability. Our task is to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, with the aim of building a democratic, cohesive and civically active society, based on shared fundamental values, preserving the language, culture and traditions of our country.



About the Project

From 1st October 2021 to 30th April 2024 the Municipality of Ropaži, in cooperation with the Municipality of Elverum in Norway (Elverum Commune) has implemented the project “Integration-related Measures in Mucenieki” with the aim: to strengthen integration activities in Mucenieki and the related reception centre for asylum seekers, promoting multicultural dialogue and closer cooperation between communities in the municipality, providing sports and leisure time infrastructure.

In order to facilitate interaction between asylum seekers and the local community, the project reconstructed the Mucenieki Stadium. In order to effectively involve asylum seekers in the local community and to build the capacity of the municipality, training and experience-building visits to Latvia and Norway were organised in cooperation with the municipality of Elverum. Experts in the fields of health, sport and culture were involved in order to gain knowledge and good practice experience in the integration of asylum seekers in the local community. In order to successfully involve the target groups in the activities, the project involved the Day Centre “Mucenieki” and the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre.

The project includes health promotion, sports and cultural activities, involving both asylum seekers and the local community. Two Health Days were held as part of the health promotion activities. Sports activities included: gymnastics for general health, Zumba for physical health, yoga for young people and adults, football for children and young people, Mamanet for women, swimming for adults, a day camp for children and young people and two Sports Day events. As part of the cultural activities, asylum seekers had the opportunity to participate in the celebration of traditional feasts by taking part in the Summer Solstice Festival, the Easter event, workshops on European culture, as well as learning about cultural history by taking part in Heritage Days. Cultural activities are concentrated in Ropazai to gain a broader perspective and get to know other villages in the municipality.

Project results:

- ✓ Reconstructed sports field in Mucenieki.
- ✓ Improved knowledge and good practices for the involvement of asylum seekers in the local community.
- ✓ 17 health promotion, sports and cultural events organised.
- ✓ A good practice guide for the integration of asylum seekers into the local community is published.
- ✓ Around 5000 participants are involved in the project activities.



The integration policy in Latvia¹

In Latvia, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for integration policy.

Together with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of the Environment and Regional Development, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the State Chancellery, the Society Integration Foundation, as well as non-governmental organisations are also involved in the development of a cohesive and civically active society.

At the heart of integration policy is understanding and cooperation between different groups and individuals, with the aim of building a democratic, cohesive and civically active society based on shared core values. Societal integration encompasses processes in the ethnic, educational, cultural, legal, political, socio-psychological, social and other spheres of human life. In the process of integration, it is essential to be aware of the values that unite society, such as democracy and the rule of law, favourable relations between people of different nationalities, respect for the development and preservation of different ethnic and cultural values. Social ties, exchange of views and intercultural communication are the basis for living together. In the context of integration, knowledge of the national language and the preservation of cultural traditions in Latvia and in the countries of the diaspora play an important role.

On 5th February 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society 2021-2027. The overarching goal of the Guidelines is a national,² solidary, open and civically active society, whose existence is based on democratic values and human rights, the Latvian language and Latvian cultural space, as laid down in the Constitution.

THE GUIDELINES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING LINES OF ACTION AND OBJECTIVES:

National identity and belonging:

- ✓ To strengthen the sense of statehood and belonging to Latvia.
- ✓ To promote the consolidation of the Latvian language as a unifying basis for society in everyday communication.
- ✓ To promote the formation of a unifying understanding of social memory in society.

A culture of democracy and inclusive citizenship:

- ✓ Promote citizens' acquisition of democratic skills and knowledge in line with global and contemporary challenges, including in the context of lifelong learning.
- ✓ Strengthen the development and sustainability of civil society by building a civic culture and developing inclusive citizenship.
- ✓ Creating a high quality, safe and inclusive space for democratic participation and information.

Integration:

- ✓ Promote the integration of foreign citizens living in Latvia into society.
- ✓ Promote people's understanding of the diversity of society by reducing negative stereotyping of different groups.



Get to know!

WHO IS AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

An asylum seeker is a person who applies for refugee or subsidiary status in accordance with the procedure established by law. The status of an asylum seeker is

¹ Source: Public Integration Fund. <https://www.integration.lv/lv/integracijas-politika>

² In the framework of the Guidelines, it is a society that respects and is motivated to preserve Latvia's national values in a context of increasing diversification of society (cultural and linguistic diversity caused by migration)

granted until the Office for Citizenship and Migration Affairs makes a decision on whether or not to grant refugee or subsidiary status

A refugee is a person who has been granted refugee status under the 1951 UN Geneva Convention in accordance with the procedure laid down by law. In Latvia, refugee status is granted to persons who:

- ✓ has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social origin or political opinion in his country of nationality or, if stateless, in his country of former habitual residence; and,
- ✓ if, for the reasons set out above, the person is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the legal protection of the country concerned and is outside its territory.

WHERE DOES THE ASYLUM SEEKER LIVE WHILE THE APPLICATION FOR STATUS IS BEING PROCESSED?

During this period, the person lives in the asylum seekers' accommodation centre in Mucenieki (Ropaži Municipality), Liepna (Alūksne Municipality) or elsewhere.

The State Border Guard accommodates detained border offenders in the accommodation centre for detained foreigners "Daugavpils". If a person requests asylum, after initial interviews he/she is transferred to the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki" or Liepna.

A decision on whether to grant refugee or subsidiary status is taken within 3 months on average, but can be extended to 12 months for good reasons.

DOES THE ASYLUM SEEKER HAVE THE POSSIBILITY TO WORK UNTIL THE STATUS IS GRANTED?

Asylum seekers do not have the right to work. However, in order to provide asylum seekers living in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre with an opportunity to make good use of their time and to start the integration process early in case they are granted the status of a refugee or a person with an alternative status, it is planned to provide the necessary information about social life in Latvia, including the laws in force, nature, etc., as well as to offer language training for everyday use to be later supplemented by the courses of the State Employment Agency after being granted the refugee or a person with an alternative status. It is also planned to offer volunteering opportunities in Asylum Seekers' Accommodation Centres, carrying out activities that would improve the quality of life and the environment for the residents of the Accommodation Centre.

DO REFUGEES HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS LATVIAN CITIZENS?

During the period after the status is granted, access to medical services, education and a range of other social services is provided to these persons on an equal basis with Latvian citizens.

They have the right to work for any employer (no additional conditions for access to the labour market). Refugees or persons with subsidiary status do not have rights that apply only to citizens of the Republic of Latvia, such as the right to hold certain positions (judges or prosecutors) and to participate in parliamentary elections. Although refugees and persons with subsidiary status are issued with a travel document and a residence permit entitling them to return to Latvia, they must ascertain the conditions to which countries the refugee or person with subsidiary status is entitled to travel and reside.³

³ Source: NGO, Society "Shelter "Safe House"". www.patverums-dm.lv

Statistics for 2023⁴

The number of asylum seekers in Latvia is increasing every year. In 2023, 1,624 people, 278 of them children, 28 of them – unaccompanied, applied for asylum in Latvia.

Refugee status is granted to 88 people and alternative status to 40. At the end of the year, 766 applications were pending.



The most common countries of origin



Syria
(248)



Afghanistan
(305)



Iran
(209)



India
(167)



Iraq
(65)



Russia
(45)



Belarus
(25)

from around 40 countries in total

Since the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, 2333 people who have crossed into Latvia as a transit have been admitted to Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centres.

More information on integration and asylum in Latvia

- ✓ National Employment Agency: www.begluintegracija.nva.gov.lv
- ✓ Public Integration Foundation: www.integration.lv
- ✓ NGO "Shelter – Safe House" (Biedrība "Patvērums "Drošā māja") www.patverums-dm.lv
- ✓ Local government websites for information on cultural, sporting and health activities, social support, public transport etc.

⁴ Data from the Office for Citizenship and Migration, Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Līgo

Latvian folk traditions



Easter

Latvian folk traditions



Workshops "Get to know Latvia in Europe!"

Cultural exploration through practice



Heritage Days

exploring medieval Europe

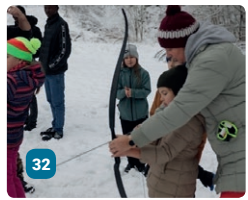
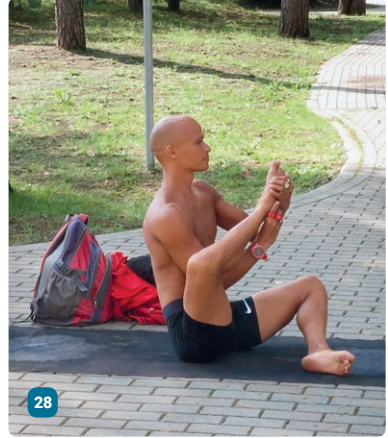




HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

Health Days

*highlighting the importance of healthy eating,
physical activity and mental health in countries
with 4 distinct seasons*





SPORT ACTIVITIES

Zumba

for physical health and energy



Gymnastics

for posture and general health



Mamanet

for women's physical health and harmony



Football

*a game whose rules are known the world over;
a game that eliminates language barriers*



Swimming

for coordination, endurance and fun



SPORT EVENTS

Day camp for children

socialising, education, fun



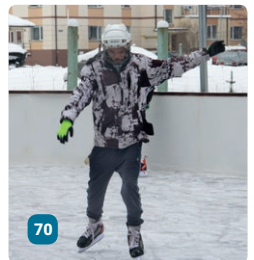
Commonwealth Sports Day

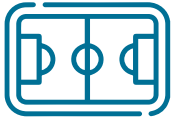
through football and attractive games



Snow day

The new stadium, winter and sport





SPORTS STADIUM RENOVATED





ADOPTION OF GOOD PRACTICES

Norway has been a multicultural country for many centuries. Today, the country has a much higher number of asylum seekers than Latvia, and its integration policy differs from Latvia's approach, mainly in economic terms. However, the municipality of Ropaži is pleased to have been able to provide inspiration and a knowledge base on integration issues when organising and implementing events in the municipality.

"Openness, honesty and respect" are the core values of the Ropaži municipality's cooperation city Elverum, which are reflected in all areas that were adopted in the programming of events and attracting visitors.





Photo captions

- 1, 5.** Masterclass of cheese making with the hostess at Midsummer festival in Ropaži
- 2.** Heating milk on fire at the masterclass of Cheese-making at the Midsummer festival in Ropaži
- 3.** Weaving a flower wreath for Midsummer
- 4.** Woodworking skills masterclass at the Midsummer Festival
- 5.** Mother and daughter with a flower wreath at the Midsummer celebration in Ropaži
- 7.** Bonfire ritual at Midsummer festival in Ropaži
- 8, 11.** Swing decorating and swinging at Easter celebrations in Ropaži
- 9, 10.** Egg dyeing and egg fighting at the Easter festival in Ropaži
- 12.** Homemade Producers' Market at the Easter Festival in Ropaži
- 13, 15.** Ceramics masterclass at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 14.** Candle-making workshop at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 16.** Wicker weaving masterclass at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 17.** Latvian traditional cooking masterclass at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 18.** Medieval food in clay bowls with wooden spoons at the Ropaži hillfort
- 19.** Livonian Order castle wall fragment in Ropaži with Latvian flag, on the day of Heritage Days event
- 20, 21.** Musicians. Playing bagpipes and drums at Ropaži Castle Hill
- 22.** Viewing the model castle on Ropaži Castle Hill, during the excursion
- 23.** Cooking in medieval costume, cooking in an iron pot
- 24.** Visitors to the Heritage Days take on the role of medieval warriors with armour and weapons
- 25.** Medieval board games at Ropaži Castle Hill
- 26.** Rye bread, baked in an ancient clay bread oven during Heritage Days at Ropaži Castle Hill
- 27, 29, 32.** Physical activity at the Health Days indoors in Zaķumiža and outdoors in Mucenieki
- 28.** During a yoga class in Mucenieki
- 30, 31, 33.** Art classes and participants' works at Ropaži Secondary School in Zaķumiža
- 34.** Vegetable and fruit snacks to promote healthy eating during the event at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 35, 36.** Zumba classes at Mucenieki Day Centre
- 37, 38.** Zumba classes at Zaķumiža Culture House
- 39, 40, 41.** Exercise classes at Mucenieki Day Centre and Stadium
- 42, 43, 45.** Mamanet classes at Ropaži and Zaķumiža sports centres
- 44.** Participants of Mamanet classes at the first meeting in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki".
- 46, 47, 48.** Football lessons in mixed groups in Ropaži
- 49.** Participants of the winning team of football lessons at Ropaži Sports Centre
- 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.** Swimming lessons and team games at Inčukalns swimming pool
- 55, 56, 57.** Activities and active games at the Mucenieki Day Centre and outdoors in the Mucenieki forest
- 58.** Go-karting at the Sports Complex "333"
- 59, 62.** Friendship football match participants - Football clubs "Elverum Football", "Valor" at Ropaži sports stadium
- 60, 61.** Creative and active activities to promote cohesion at the Sports Complex "333"
- 63, 68.** Big Snow Football Game, Mucenieki Sports Stadium
- 64, 66.** Sled-pulling competition and fun relays at Mucenieki sports stadium
- 65.** Cooking lunch on fire for Snow Day visitors at the Mucenieki sports stadium
- 67, 69, 70.** Opening of the skating rink; a game "Almost a hockey player" at Mucenieki sports stadium
- 71.** A bird's eye view of the reconstructed Mucenieki Stadium
- 72.** Football team "Valor" players' demonstration on the opening day of Mucenieki stadium on 24 November 2023
- 73.** Elverum Municipality representative Daria Monika Dyresen, deputy chairman Ainārs Vaičulēns Ropaži Municipality, construction company SIA "SC Būve" representative Māris Miķelsons during the opening of the stadium on 24 November 2023, Mucenieki Day Centre
- 74, 75.** Representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Elverum Municipality, construction company "SC Grupa" and Ropaži Municipality during the opening of the stadium on 24 November 2023
- 76.** Representatives of Elverum Municipality and Ropaži Municipality during the construction of Mucenieki Stadium in September 2023
- 77.** Meeting of Ropaži Municipality, Elverum Municipality and Football Club "Valor" in Ropaži
- 78.** Presentation by the municipality at the project closing conference in Elverum Municipality, Norway
- 79.** Alf Christian Enger, representative of the Municipality of Elverum, visit in Ulbroka
- 80.** Visit of the representatives of Elverum and Ropaži municipalities to the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki", representatives Andrejs Račkovs and Nauris Bērziņš
- 81.** Participants bus transfer in Ropaži district, during the Sports Day. In the foreground: football player and Elverum municipality representative Daria Monika Dyresen
- 82.** Representatives of Elverum and Ropaži municipalities on the final visit to Elverum municipality
- 83.** Visit of the representatives of the municipalities of Elverum and Ropaži to the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki"
- 84.** Immigrant players from Elverum Football club share their experiences and life stories to inspire young people at the Sports Fellowship Day in Ropaži



Working together for a competitive Europe!